RUTH'S PEDAGOGY: INTERSECTIONS OF SEXUALITY AND CLASS IN SOMATIC METAPHOR AND IMAGERY

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ABSTRACT

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Here I argue that representations of malady in *Ruth* function in such a way as to not only reinforce bourgeois ideology of good and moral behavior along both gender and class lines, but to connect moral transgressions—a form of "insanity"—with sickness through language of susceptibility and malady. This interrelationship surrounding propriety is also utilized by Gaskell in order to demonstrate a possibility of recovery; Ruth occupies both the figure of the fallen woman and that of the angel of the house, and Gaskell, by couching her lesson in terms well recognized by the contemporary middle class reader, illustrates the importance of circumstance and the ability of a person to make penance. However, Gaskell remains within convention, not truly questioning existing social systems in the creation of the fallen woman and utilizing metaphor and imagery that depends on contemporary characterizations of the working class and women as categorical Others. Further, Ruth remains such an individualized character that she becomes unbelievable, and while Gaskell's contemporary readers may feel sympathy for Ruth, they do not extend this sympathy to the fallen women they encounter in their own lives.

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INTRODUCTION

Ruth is not Elizabeth Gaskell's most popular work within either the Victorian or modern context, but it was still widely read, discussed, praised, and condemned after its publication in 1853. Like her peer Charles Dickens, she was a social novelist and consistently tackled problems related to social stratification and the effects of industrialization on Victorian society. As her second novel, *Ruth* addresses many of the same themes Gaskell incorporates in *Mary Barton*, but represents a more sophisticated message, by nature of evolution of opinion in the five-year gap between publication of the works.

Overview

Ruth, as a social novel, is a pedagogical text in which Gaskell unpacks the image of the fallen woman and attempts to arouse sympathy from her audience, for the purpose of teaching them to not so harshly condemn the fallen women they encounter in their lives. From a general survey of contemporary reviews it appears that Gaskell was successful in her goal; even detractors of *Ruth* admit the impossibility for a reader to believe Ruth was at fault for her circumstance. However, contemporary reviews do still find issues with Gaskell's purpose, her characters as realistic, and other areas that take away from the success of the message.

There is a danger in the common mistake made of generalizing assumptions of ideological beliefs of the mid-Victorian middle class and simplifying or ignoring the existence of a complex, ever-changing discourse surrounding social issues that very much included class and

gender. However, it is impossible within the confines of this space to accurately represent the entire diversity of contemporary ideological discourse. For the sake of argument, "a belief in the existence and measurability of physical and mental hierarchies, and in the need for middle- and upper-class white Europeans to maintain their position at the top of those hierarchies" (Vrettos 148) can be ascribed to the contemporary audience of *Ruth*, and may be done so without risk of ahistoricism.

As noted by Fee, women's sexuality, class, and malady were intrinsically linked within Victorian social discourse, making it vital that the interrelationship between these is examined. Great attention has been given in Victorian studies to the link between gender, sexuality, and somatic metaphor and imagery; class connections with sexuality, gender, and even sickness have additionally been studied. However there does not seem to be any one critical text that gives equal attention to class and gender intersections in connection to malady and representations of malady in fiction, and *Ruth,* despite being a pedagogical text that includes all of these elements, has not been read or evaluated based on an understanding of this interrelationship. There is still literature that confirms and acknowledges popular belief connecting morality to mental and physical health (Fee, Ussher). Additionally, not only did contemporary pedagogical texts use sickness imagery and metaphor for the purpose of social reformist agendas (Kehler), but this was done along class lines and appropriated bourgeois beliefs that connected class status to health and morality. Gender issues, particularly women's sexuality, were also coded within imagery and metaphor of sickness, disease, and disorder in contemporary Mid-Victorian works, and is inseparable from prevailing social thought regarding the "healthy" and "morally good" society.

With a developed understanding of the connection between these, *Ruth* may be evaluated for how it represents intersections of middle class beliefs regarding women's sexuality and class status in malady, and what the implications of these representations are to the overarching narrative. The novel's pedagogical purpose may also be questioned, as whether or not Gaskell truly was effective in redressing the image of the fallen woman—that is, a woman marked by sexual transgression outside of marriage and thereby fallen from grace with God—as a sympathetic one, or whether this is undermined by a narrative that continues to "other" these women in such a way that it remains within the conventional confines of bourgeois discourse surrounding issues of malady, women's sexuality, and class lines. In the end, there remains the question of if "Gaskell was fundamentally interested in unrevolutionary and nontraumatic change" (Kucich 200).

Objective

The objective of this thesis is to analyze Gaskell's work in order to examine how somatic representations are coded in relation to the intersections of women's sexuality and class lines and to match these to contemporary bourgeoisie beliefs about the interrelationship between sexuality, class, and malady (especially as connected to immorality). Finally, this thesis will evaluate the implications of this to the pedagogy of *Ruth,* a work given considerably less attention than its predecessor *Mary Barton,* despite its representation of Gaskell's evolution in beliefs regarding issues addressed in both texts.

Methodology

Schools of Criticism

Literature used to construct the wide overview of background knowledge to develop this reading of *Ruth* has been selected for strong historicism in order to ensure historical accuracy and maintain proper contextualization. While the nature of literary analysis does lead to arguments that may or may not be intentional or even plausible products of the author's work, it remains important to keep in mind the world in which this text was produced. Additionally, due to this analysis focusing on women and class, this reading belongs to the schools of feminist and Marxist analysis, as do many of the referenced sources.

Acknowledging my own subscription to postmodernist historiography and analysis, there will be an emphasis on contextualizing analysis that may affect claims made. *Ruth* is a pedagogical text, and, despite any reactionary or bourgeois components of its pedagogy, did act to present a humanizing narrative of circumstances that may surround a fallen woman. However, I will also argue that, because *Ruth* not only pulls on conventional representations of malady but additionally distances the character of Ruth from realistic—not to be confused with stereotypical or derivative—representations of adolescent girlhood and the working poor, this allows for any progressive lesson Gaskell preaches to still fall within conventionality. Thus, *Ruth* teaches the individual without questioning the role of existing institutions in the creation of the sinful woman. Recovery is also individualized and relies on the kindness of the petty bourgeois and innate goodness in order to achieve redemption. Fundamentally, Gaskell uses familiar representations of malady to instruct the reader that sexual transgression is not a death sentence

but instead an illness one may recover from. Sickness, both mental and physical, is symptomatic of moral error and is connected to gender and class. Gaskell characterizes Ruth to become a sympathetic figure using conventions familiar to her middle class audience, but because of these conventions, Ruth does not fall within the class or gender boundaries that force her audience to recognize the working-class women of their reality within Ruth.

CHAPTER I

MALADY IN RUTH

Ruth's Personal History and Fall

Before the reader, of 1853 or now, begins *Ruth,* they first encounter a Phineas Fletcher poem from 1633, entitled "Hymn", which references implicitly Mary Magdalene and explicitly repentance through Christ. The tone that Gaskell sets for *Ruth* is then deeply religious, obviously reformist, and contemplative. There is no mistake of what she set out to do with *Ruth* or that it in *Ruth*, like *Mary Barton* and "Lizzie Leigh", "redemption is reached through suffering... a doctrine [Gaskell] clung to passionately, and used, sometimes, to morbid effect" (Gérin 107). Ruth is introduced to the reader as a name among a crowded workroom of girls, one of many apprentices to Mrs. Mason, a seamstress, working even at two in the morning.

But Ruth does not remain undistinguished for long; her nature, her temperament, different from the other working girls, is addressed early. The cold air and beauty of the night draw her attention, just as her sleeping spot is the coldest and darkest one, which "she had instinctively chosen... a remnant of the beauty of the old drawing-room" (Gaskell 9). While other girls shiver, cough, stretch, sneeze, and yawn, "Ruth pressed her hot forehead against the cold glass" (Gaskell 8). Contemporary Victorian discourse understood the body as a system of intake and outgo (Vrettos glossing Charles Rosenberg, 23). Exchange between the external and internal permeates *Ruth*, and understanding this system is foundational to many Victorian scholars and critics, including John Lamb, Grace Kehler, Elaine Showalter, and other theorists drawn on here.

Sickness is a result then of imbalance of the body, which is subjected to this exchange of influence as per the degree of susceptibility that accompanied one's social standing. Vrettos extends causal imbalance beyond the physical; emotion too, especially in women, is subjected to infection, internalization and externalizations with somatic effect (Vrettos 23). In Victorian discourse "a common cultural narrative about the 'natural language of feeling' emerges from that these texts, [revealing] both the symbolic importance and ideological instability of body language as a category of meaning" (Vrettos 47). Body language, and further, malady and its manifestations, can then be observed as signifiers not only of locations in which the internal is made readable to the audience, but places acted upon by ideology, nature, and circumstance. As depicted in literature, "the individual acts on the world, the world (place, people, things organic and inorganic) pre-exists and continuously informs the emotional and physical senses; the senses, in turn present their own challenges to identity construction, for they at operate either in tandem with the mind or involuntarily" (Kehler 438). In order to analyze somatic metaphor, we can analyze the senses and how the characters interact with the world in order to understand how this interplays with categorical identities of interest; namely, class and gender.

Ruth is described as hot, scarlet, warm, and red-cheeked in a wide range of moments throughout the first volume. In fact, due to just how often flushes, blushes, temperature, feelings of infection, sudden dizziness, etc., are mentioned in *Ruth*, not every instance, or even the great majority of instances, can be accounted for within this space. However, they fit consistently within a steadily observable pattern, so particularly significant moments within the narrative are

focused on rather than listing an inundation of evidence for every faint or sudden excitement that Ruth feels.

Humoral theory was no longer recognized scientific thought in Gaskell's time, but with somatic imagery as an avenue in which the body can be read, Ruth's temperament remains significant to the reader. It makes evident that not only is she imbalanced, though not dramatically enough to be chronically ill like Jenny or the other girls, as Ruth "was not yet inured to the hardship of a dressmaker's workroom" (Gaskell 9). Ruth is vulnerable and Ruth's sanguine nature—warm, young, lively, sociable, optimistic—fits with her disposition to heat. It marks her as different from Jenny and the other apprentices, and she cannot tolerate the stillness of the room as they sleep (Gaskell 11). No matter that she is definitely comparable to the other girls as a worker under Mrs. Mason and an adolescent of poor circumstance, Ruth is still individualized and differentiated. In fact, few of them are ever given personality or names, except for Jenny, "a girl who had unwillingly distinguished herself by a long and fit of coughing" (Gaskell 8). Individuality isn't extended in the narrative to other apprenticed girls except for Jenny, who then serves as Gaskell's representation of this demographic. Her malady is chronic, not a result of imbalance (Jenny is good natured, plain, and kind) but instead consequence of her class status and associated working conditions.

When Ruth meets Mr. Bellingham she is literally kneeling as she fixes the dresses of various privileged women. In the instant of them becoming aware of one another, "Ruth was infected by the feeling" (Gaskell 17), and Bellingham is attracted to "the scarlet color of

annoyance flush to that beautiful cheek which was partially presented to him" (Gaskell 17). Their encounter marks the beginning of Ruth's seduction and the end of Ruth as she stood unharmed by outside influence. The red flush gains immense significance, a signaler of vulnerability and a sanguine temperament to the wealthy Bellingham as well as Gaskell's contemporary readers. Her circumstance is inseparable from class dynamics; there would be no mistake to anyone that Ruth was a member of the working class, who were viewed as "inherently less moral, less delicate, more physical, and more capable of strenuous labor" (Langland 295). However, this inscribed class identity is offset by Gaskell's rhetoric which has consistently differentiated Ruth from her peers to occupy a liminal position of unique levels of charity, naïveté, and femininity. The presentation of the cheek, as Gaskell puts it, also carries implications of femininity, associated subservience and again, vulnerability. Feeling infects Ruth, and with that infection begins the machinations of the plot and pedagogy.

The feedback between internal and external, physical and mental, can experience incongruity and Victorian texts dealing with this achieve affect by "highlighting both the vulnerability of the self to the world and the obstreperousness of the sensations at work in the individual" (Kehler 438). When Ruth and Bellingham accidentally encounter Mrs. Mason some time after their first meeting, Ruth is fired from her position in the seamstress' workroom, at once losing her employment, income, secured future, housing, and the sole authority figure in her life. The physical effects are immense; Ruth becomes pale, cold, starts shaking and loses her appetite entirely as Bellingham uses this opportune moment to persuade Ruth to accompany him to London rather than return to the only benefactors she has. Breaking down, "the room whirled

round before Ruth; it was a dream—a strange, varying, shifting dream—with the old home of her childhood for one scene, with the terror of Mrs. Mason's unexpected appearance for another; and then, strangest, dizziest, happiest of all, there was the consciousness of his love" (Gaskell 51). The overwhelming of sensations constitutes to the reader a temporary madness. As Ruth's firing was a matter of propriety, though she had done nothing sinful yet, immorality and transgression are here linked to consequences of madness, which in turn has consequences of physical ailment.

On this page in the text Ruth utters a distinctive "yes" to Bellingham's request—one that the reader, in such a deeply religious book, cannot help but compare to popular imaginings of the "yes" of the Virgin Mary, and a modern reader might extend themselves to the Madonna/whore notion—essentially consenting, unknowingly, to leaving behind her innocence. Emotional crises were considered catalyst enough for madness in women, but further, "puberty was... a potentially traumatic transition from the freedom of androgynous childhood to the confines of the adult feminine role" (Showalter 56). As this moment Gaskell begins Ruth on the path away from the innocence with which she did not suspect Bellingham's motivations and towards her "fall". In that way, this constitutes a metaphoric puberty, the advent of sexual availability and movement away sexless childhood.

When Bellingham falls sick, Ruth finds that she is helpless to assist him. Her first attempts at treating his symptoms are drawn from her childhood experience of caring for her dying mother, and they do nothing to help him. She is unable even to diagnose him; "it was a new form of illness to the miserable Ruth" (Gaskell 65). By this time, Ruth has become a fallen

woman, facing social scorn from other residents of the inn aware that she and Mr. Bellingham are unwed and of very different social standings. She then has deviated from the contemporary ideals of hegemonic femininity after already being a vulnerable member of society as a working-class girl. Expressions of sexuality were not only impermissible but were "the major, almost defending symptom of insanity in women" (Showalter 74), especially among poor women, who were diagnosed as morally insane and institutionalized at significantly higher rates than their social betters. The effect of this is manifested in Ruth's inability to read Bellingham as she should be capable, for "if the ideal nurse is empathically attuned to her patient's body, the hysterical nurse has crossed into a state of hermeneutic excess that threatens the boundaries of identity" (Vrettos 46).

Further, Ruth's experience with reading malady in the body is fundamentally tied to her identity. The loyal daughter caring for her dying mother is a distinctly feminine picture, and the other encounter Ruth has to draw experience from is her time under Mrs. Mason. As the socially vulnerable are not only the somatically vulnerable but also experience malady distinctive to their circumstance, the coughs and fevers of adolescent girls apprenticed to a seamstress do not translate onto the body of a wealthy adult man. Ruth and her fellow working girls are subjects and objects, without the agency or the moral sanity to affect change.

Ruth finds herself unable to nurse Bellingham, unable to either properly diagnose or treat his illness, and keeps vigilance over him as substitution. By the time when she hears that his mother is coming to nurse him, "she was worn out with watching, and exhausted by passionate

crying" (Gaskell 69). Mrs. Bellingham represents what Ruth is not within the text. Married, older, wealthy, and fully adhering to contemporary ideals of bourgeois femininity. As identity was defined by juxtaposition to a classified Other in Victorian discourse, Mrs. Bellingham comes to inform Gaskell's readers, most of whom would be much more familiar with figures like the Bellinghams in their material lives than poor girls like Ruth, of who Ruth is at this moment. Though Mrs. Morgan, the inn keeper, has in turn both disdained Ruth for her moral transgression and helped her out of pity and some level of sympathy, she does not accomplish what Mrs. Bellingham does narratively. Of course, "the ordering of the working classes according to the paradigm of bourgeois domestic space... contained within it... as a given, a judgement of their character" (Lamb 41). This classification was an essential step for reform in the Victorian context as exemplified by the developments of sociology, psychiatry, anthropology and other fields created as extensions of conflations of definition, control, understanding, and fixing. Mrs. Bellingham's evaluation is swift and condemning, pronouncing Ruth "the girl, then, whose profligacy had led her son astray... nay, this was the real cause of his illness, his mortal danger at this present time" (Gaskell 73). Mrs. Bellingham, standing in for bourgeois society as a whole, defines Ruth as a fallen woman. Further, she diagnoses her, just as writers of Victorian reformer treatises diagnoses the urban laborers and their dwellings (Lamb), as the very source of the degradation she and her surroundings experience.

Gaskell uses omniscient third-person narration to assure the reader that Mrs. Bellingham "did not understand Ruth... did not imagine the faithful trustfulness of her heart" (Gaskell 73). Gaskell allows in *Ruth* the narrative of the fallen woman, going beyond what modern readers

would think would adequately satisfy her demonstration of the ability of even the least irredeemable of society to be redeemed and to not be trapped for their entire lives by singular sins. In this moment, Gaskell "insists upon the power of circumstance" (Morgan 48) so that her reader never forgets that Ruth is not to blame and condemn for her status and subsequent abandonment.

Ruth is abandoned by Bellingham at the inn and left pregnant, without work or hope, and in a state of destitution. Victorian medical discourse viewed sexual promiscuity as cause enough for madness, but poverty as well was "one of the moral causes of insanity" and poor women were committed to asylums much more often than their wealthier counterparts (Showalter 54). The emotional distress experienced by Ruth when she realizes she has been left a note and fifty pounds in exchange for all that she experienced at Bellingham's hands is nothing less than an episode of madness, one that may have been even permanent if not the intervention of Mr. Benson. Mr. Benson, based on a charitable minister with whom Gaskell was familiar, is the key figure to the text and its pedagogy; he is not the nurse or the classifier but instead a religious incarnation of a psychiatrist. It is with Mr. Benson that Ruth can garner redemption and grow to emulate the ideal Victorian woman and enjoy the balance, sanity, and good health that should come with it.

After reading the letter, Ruth runs along the road, wishes for death, walks for some unknown distant, encounters beggar children, and doubts God before coming across "the deformed gentleman she had twice before seen" (Gaskell 81). Mr. Benson, having already, and

exceptionally, created a sympathetic personal history for Ruth, understands her physical appearance as a manifestation of the internal when they cross paths:

> There he saw the young girl whose he had noticed at first for her innocent beauty, and the second time for the idea he had gained respecting her situation; he saw her dress soiled and dim, her bonnet crushed and battered with her tossing to and fro on the moorland bed; he saw the poor, lost wanderer, and when he saw her, he had compassion on her. (Gaskell 81)

Mr. Benson's Christian pity would be for naught if Ruth was not the person she was. It is because "the tender nature was in her still" (Gaskell 82) that she responds to his cry for help, different from the mentioned remonstrance that would more likely be utilized by others. Further, consciousness of social propriety "kept her still, and it was gradually soothing her" (Gaskell 83). She does not avert but rather fall on the more pleasant side of the "juxtaposed images of women and as the castrating sexual monster... prevalent in nineteenth-century literature, medicine, psychiatry, and popular discourse" (Ussher 86). Thus, from here onward Gaskell proposes her treatment to the epidemic of fallen woman, her program for rehabilitation of the mad and sick through Ruth and with a strong mind to understanding the power and importance of circumstance to the creation of the classified fallen woman.

Ruth's Redemption

Having provided the circumstance in which Ruth fell pregnant, Gaskell move on to the more complex portion of her pedagogy, the way in which fallen women can be redeemed, if one recognizes them as products of identities and frameworks they did not choose. Per contemporary

discourse, spiritual purity "has to be bought at the price of further suffering and self-sacrifice" (Gérin 129), but only if the candidate was viable for such redemption. Ruth's kind disposition and Benson's intervention rescue Ruth from succumbing to madness. Sexuality is a quick path to madness under the feminine condition, and of the labels allowed for women of any social position in mid-Victorian life, "only as a 'wife' is one safe" (Ussher 87). Bourgeois wives and mothers, angels of the house, are afforded the position of enshrinement of safe femininity. With this in mind, Ruth's disguise as a widowed mother is the only option that saves her.

There are two sides to the Bensons' lie. One, that it was an entirely necessary action taken in order to give Ruth the chance of redemption. Two, that action being a lie and thereby a sin makes the entire enterprise one with moral complexities. The deception is Faith Benson's idea originally, as Mr. Benson points out (Gaskell 105). It is also not unimportant that Sally, though she carries serious doubts about the validity of Ruth's story, aids in the deception by cutting Ruth's hair so that she is less beautiful and more of a picture of grief. Gaskell does rescue the Bensons and Sally, narrating that "this household had many failings; they were but human" (Gaskell 119) while the overall religious zeal and humility of the Bensons are dictated to the reader. Further, the lie is exposed later in the narrative with consequences upon the Bensons, inflicted by the Bradshaws wielding the power their money and middle class status affords them. While Mr. Bradshaw is not a particularly sympathetic character at times, Victorian readers would find many of his actions far more sympathetic than a modern reader. He of course serves as a representation of the bourgeois to the extent of being the pronouncer of Ruth's purity at the novel's close.

Whatever the complexities of this, it is without a doubt that it is at the home of the Bensons that Ruth undergoes her rehabilitation. Treatment for Ruth's "sickness"—meaning both that physical manifestation of madness and the sin of sexuality—had to present in "a practical working means" (Gérin 132). The steadfast diet of humility, modesty, Christian ethics, etc., was put forth as Ruth "had to be saved from despair, from poverty, from the will to die" (Gérin 132). Though at the cost of a white lie, Ruth undergoes such complete transformation that, as expected, can be read on her body:

> If her early brilliancy of coloring was gone, a clear ivory skin, as smooth as satin, told of complete and perfect health... The increase of dignity in her face had been imparted to her form... And although she had lived in a very humble home, yet there was something about either it, or her, or the people amongst whose she had been thrown during the last few years, which has so changed her, that whereas, six or seven years ago, you would have perceived that she was not altogether a lady by birth and education, yet now she might have been placed among the highest in the land, and would have been taken by the most critical judge for their equal. (Gaskell 173)

This rehabilitation and transformation is the great point of Gaskell's work. The process by which this is produced, and then later tested, is of equal importance.

Ruth's restoration to physical, mental, and moral health is a product of the diligent watchfulness of the Bensons and Sally, their maid. Living in their household, Ruth lives the life of the lower middle class preacher's kin; her attentions and days are employed in Bible study,

prayer, sewing, housework not carried out by Sally, and contemplation. Victorian asylums sought the cure to madness through strict moral management, emphasizing "ladylike salutes of silence, decorum, taste, service, piety, and gratitude" (Showalter 79). In short, treatment and cure lay in the impositions of bourgeois femininity upon the mad woman. Women were tasked with performance of gendered labor such as what household management would entail, with their appearance strictly regulated, modesty enforced, and deviance strictly punished (Showalter 80-84). Gaskell's moral management of Ruth is not much different. Ruth becomes a mother, watched and chastised by both Sally and Miss Benson as well as Mr. Benson, who acts as a religious iteration of the Victorian psychiatrist. She performs needlework, no doubt drawing upon her skills developed under Mrs. Mason, and becomes a governess for the Bradshaw family.

The figure of the governess in Victorian fiction is nearly ubiquitous. The job is one distinctly gendered and occupies an unusual class position that may be best described as the petty bourgeoisie so greatly admired by the Victorians. The Bensons, whose mannerisms are distinct bourgeois even as they live only above the poverty line, may also be classified as such. To be petty bourgeois was to meet the requirements of good moral sanity, from religious devotion to modesty, while only having the funds for a simple life above the status of the working class but without the means for the middle class and aristocracy's temptation for greed or wealth. Further, governesses held a unique position of influence over middle class children. They were simultaneously well-suited to the task, as "women's hermeneutic skills and their powers of emotional disguise were believed to be complementary attributes" (Vrettos 29), and dangerous in

it, for governesses held sway over the moral upbringing on children, and, as petty bourgeois figures, were more susceptible to moral and physical contagion.

Ruth becoming a governess is then a risky maneuver, and Gaskell, perhaps conscious of potential critique, does not allow this to occur without debate within the text. In contemporary discourse, "the single most effective technique used in reasserting the dominance of the will and individual self-control was the discipline of work" (Fee 636), and any rehabilitation would not leave its patient idle or unemployed. The points are drawn of the long term benefits of having an occupation, work to keep the mind busy, and a task that involved taking care of children. It is decided that she does not pose that much of a risk to Mr. Bradshaw's children, as Mr. Benson says, "'I have watched Ruth, and I believe she is pure and truthful; and the very sorrow and penitence she has felt—the very suffering she has gone through—has given her a thoughtful conscientiousness'" (Gaskell 165). Therefore, Ruth becomes a governess, though she continues living with the Bensons. This has dual purpose of inserting her into bourgeois space where she must not only school her own mannerisms but pass on etiquette to susceptible middle class children, as well as putting her rehabilitation thus far to the test and further transforming her.

Ruth's rehabilitation, guided carefully by Mr. Benson, is one that emphasizes modesty, femininity, religious devotion without excess, and other values that fall under the expectations of contemporary hegemonic femininity, which of course is a specifically bourgeois ideal. Ruth is remade in the image of an angel of the house "a middle class ideal built explicitly on a class system in which political and economic differences were rewritten as differences of

nature" (Langland 295). The implication of overcoming natural inferiority because of Ruth's proletarian background and fallen woman status is distorted by Gaskell's efforts to differentiate her from other working-class girls, manifested in differences in physical temperament which signaled difference of innate nature, and Ruth's utter naïveté, a result in part of her sheltered background and femininity. Becoming a governess additionally furthers Ruth from working-class femininity by inserting her into a liminal space of uncertain class status but certain expectations of moral sanity well known by contemporary readers.

The third volume of *Ruth* can appear almost unnecessary; by the end of the second volume it may seem clear to the modern reader that Ruth has done more than penance for her sexual transgression and has been reformed into a model of Mid-Victorian ideals of femininity. But Gaskell wanted *Ruth* to be pedagogically airtight; Ruth's reform would be further tested and she would prove her worth. In the first volume of the text, there are two notable instances of Ruth playing nurse unsuccessfully, for her dying mother prior to the events of the novel, and to Bellingham. In the third volume, when she is a mother herself, she nurses Bellingham and countless nameless victims of a local epidemic. Like in the first volume, she falls ill herself, victim to her feminine susceptibility. The first and third volumes of the text act as parallels and as juxtaposed personal history/circumstance and aftereffect, with the second volume playing the role of prescription.

Ruth, as mentioned previously, was a novel into which Gaskell put great effort forth. A short story titled "Lizzie Leigh" contained a much shortened version of the same plot, published

years prior as either first draft or a test run for reception. When Charles Dickens read "Lizzie Leigh", he wrote to Gaskell, with whom he had a close professional and editorial relationship, of his objections to Lizzie's death at the conclusion, finding it unnecessary and unjust (Gérin 107). On Ruth's death in the published novel in 1853, Charlotte Bronte wrote a personal letter to Gaskell with similar protests (Gérin 132). The modern reader may no doubt feel similarly indignant that, after all, Ruth perishes in a conclusion that reads as hysterically religious even in a novel fundamentally concerned with religion.

But before her arguably unnecessary death comes the moments in which Ruth's redemption are proven to the readers. It seems that, despite the purification Ruth appears to undergo in the second volume, the fact that this was built on opportunities purchased by the Bensons' lie, that more is necessary. Ruth's real past is exposed to the cast of the novel, and playing nurse in the epidemic not only wins Ruth back the regard of her son Leonard, but of the community at large. Gaskell, never one for subtly, even frames this in explicitly Christian, not just somatic, terms. After being forgiven by the village and her son, Ruth, watched by Mr. Benson's "anxious eye", is a little pale but still had eyes full of "spiritual light", rose lips, and a sweet smile, the markers of fatigue, but, significantly, not ill health (Gaskell 351). Though Ruth entered the hospital to cure patients there out of the goodness of her heart, it is their testimony that "cures" her in the eyes of her son. That, though not literally, Ruth accomplishes this as a product of hospitalization (asylums!), is not entirely unironic.

Before dying, Ruth accomplishes one great act of nursing and completes the parallels of the first volume to the third. While when Bellingham fell sick at the inn in the first volume, she was unable to do much more than keep vigil, it is here that she is able to nurse him to full health. This signifies that Ruth has met the hallmarks of hegemonic femininity; it takes a clean and pure woman to be a successful nurse, as women are understood to be as quick of contaminators as they are temptresses. However, purity makes one more susceptible. Bourgeois women were understood as the most vulnerable to danger in society, and even if Ruth is still technically poor, she has not only lived with the Bensons, who are technically petty bourgeois, and worked as a governess for a bourgeois family, and anyway emulates bourgeois ideals of womanhood in mannerisms. That she is not obligated to help Bellingham but does so out of the kindness of her heart is also not insignificant.

Reading people, as we know, is woman's work and while nursing Bellingham, "every sense had been strained in watching" (Gaskell 363). And just as Bellingham's fever breaks, Ruth's physical features are described as to allow the audience to read the effect that this has had on Ruth, how she has internalized what she has seen and been exposed to. As in the beginning, Ruth is once again choleric, "with her crimson lips parted with the hurrying death, and the fever-flush brilliant on her cheeks" (Gaskell 364). Infection is imminent then, but death means that this time Ruth will not be marked by it. Ruth's death not only ends her personal history, but ensures that it is concluded without stain or sin left. She dies two days later, laying in the same attic she gave birth to Leonard in, and the last physical description before she follows the light she sees is one of "exquisite peacefulness" and a "lovely, rapturous, breathless smile" (Gaskell 366).

CHAPTER II

CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS AND PEDAGOGY

Social Reform Novels and Gaskell

Gaskell was fundamentally a social reform novelist. Those familiar with biography of her know of her extensive involvement with not only the related literary scene, but with charity work, mostly of a religious disposition, largely focused in the city of Manchester, the same city studied by Engels and Chadwick for their tracts. Gaskell can be understood as complicit with the mid-Victorian concern with the moral ordering of society and health of the body politic, from which "the maintenance of the bourgeois social order was thought to demand the practice of bourgeois values, both by the bourgeoisie themselves and by other classes" (Fee 633).

Gaskell's ambition with *Ruth* was nearly Herculean in nature; while she had used illness to try to redeem the fallen woman in *Mary Barton*, *Ruth* was meant to tackle all of the complexities attached to the issue in contemporary discourse. She sought to write a working-class girl that engaged in sex outside of marriage and outside of her class structure, and demonstrate that she could still be redeemed by "the transforming power of time" (Morgan 47) and was in fact not entirely at fault for her own circumstances. Turning a fallen woman into an angel of house meant overcoming an underlying assumption made by her audience of who could fundamentally even be good and moral. After all, "the angel in the house is a middle-class ideal built explicitly on a class system in which political and economic differences were rewritten as differences in nature" (Langland 295). Ruth, by her background, is incongruous with the image

of the angel of the house, even if she possibly has the disposition for it, and it is through Ruth's difference that Gaskell lets her rise up beyond it.

Ruth is not a perfect novel. Perhaps best summarized by a modern biographer, in *Ruth*, "without offering any prescriptions for improving that order, Mrs. Gaskell set out so to inform and touch her readers as to arouse their social conscience and pity, knowing that these are the preliminaries to any effective movement of reform" (Gérin 128). Somatic metaphor would be her vehicle, as "Victorian attempts at social reform were routed through the visceral, sensible knowledge of the body" (Kehler 439). However, as implied by Gérin, Gaskell approaches her pedagogy through convention and with the underlying assumptions that existing social structures were both innate and necessary. This in some ways undermines much of her pedagogy to the modern reader. There remains, however, questions of how her contemporaries responded, in public and private to the case of *Ruth.*

The Construction of a Pedagogy

Gaskell's goal with *Ruth*—to use Ruth to communicate a sympathetic tale of a fallen woman in order to teach her readers to extend this empathy towards these women in their lives, to describe the possibility of rehabilitation "by patient endurance and steady perseverance in well-doing" (*The Critic* 69)—is by now well familiar. To accomplish this, sickness is vehicle not only for the plot to function but to act as a signaler, a way for the characters and readers to "read" Ruth and understand her internal state by her external—after all, as "physiological effects could be attributed to the emotional life of the subject, learning to read the physical signs of emotion

formed a crucial medical and literary project" (Vrettos 23). Malady serves the basic narrative, allowing Ruth's progress to be noted, but further, somatic imagery is indicative of the susceptibility and mental and moral sanity and health of Ruth as a character. Ruth's rehabilitation contains an insistence on the possibility of personal regeneration via an education of the mind and manner, even if "the heroine to be educated is a kind of character thought of as past educating" (Morgan 48). The way that somatic markers appear within the text is dependent on the interrelationship between class, women and women's sexuality, and malady within contemporary discourse.

Coding

There remains a question of whether Ruth as a figure is recognizable to Gaskell's audience as a realistic representation of a working-class girl. Primary readers of novels like *Ruth* were petty bourgeois to middle class and were not necessarily inclined to be sympathetic to any story about fallen women. Within the text Ruth is differentiated from the rest of the working girls under Mrs. Mason by virtue of her temperament, manifested for the reader by Ruth's body, as analyzed in chapter one of this thesis.

Still, Ruth's differentiation is not entirely a product of some authorial weakness. For one, if Ruth's pathway to fallen womanhood, or if she become the prostitute that Victorian discourse fixated on as a sign of the moral decay of the body politic, it "would have been well-nigh impossible for Mrs. Gaskell to enlist sympathy for her subject" (Gérin 132). Since contemporary discourse maintained that women were more susceptible to emotional influence, which could in turn manifest in illness or bodily effect as it was internalized within the mind, somatic metaphor

and imagery was almost required of Gaskell in order to communicate the inner workings of Ruth, especially in a novel in which her own understanding of herself is never really privileged. In fact, while Ruth is "read" and "diagnosed" by both audience and characters, she never is allowed to do this to herself. Gaskell in some ways was trapped by the conventions of the novel and the general expectation of authors to caution "about the somatic effects of emotional engagement while simultaneously seeking to produce sympathetic responses in the reader" (Vrettos 28).

This can appear to be confirmed by the language found in some contemporary reviews of *Ruth*; the failings of the "feminine mind" are not an infrequent criticism levied at Gaskell. And that previously mentioned danger of Ruth as unrealistic or unrecognizable seems to appear as frequently, generally alongside a charge of weakness of conviction or skill on Gaskell's part. In "The False Morality of Lady Novelists" the reviewer does hesitate to make clear his opinion on Gaskell's "damaging and unfaithful inconsistency" (166):

> If she designed to awaken the word's compassion for the ordinary class of betrayed and deserted Magdalenas, the circumstances of Ruth's error should not have been made so innocent, nor should Ruth herself have been painted as so perfect. If she intended to describe a saint (as she has done), she should not have held conventional and mysterious language about her as a grievous sinner. ("The False Morality of Lady Novelists" 166-167)

To this reviewer at least, Ruth is in no way a recognizable representation of a fallen woman. And truthfully the excess of the penance through which Gaskell puts Ruth was a cause of some negative reaction following the publication of *Ruth;* notably both Charles Dickens and

Charlotte Bronte both wrote to Gaskell asking why she killed poor Ruth in the end. Another reviewer found Ruth lacking in the passion expected from a woman of her circumstance—an implicit reference to her working poor background—but also recognized "had Ruth erred from passion rather than from ignorance... we would had the usual objectionable dragging through dangerous mazes of sentiments and suffering" ("The Lady Novelists of Great Britain" 22).

Ruth's innocence, which does explain the lack of "passion" she exhibits towards Bellingham in the first volume, is incongruous with reader's expectations for a girl of Ruth's social position, even with Ruth's youth. This may be alleviated by her backstory, as she only found herself employed under Mrs. Mason fairly recently at the novel's beginning, but that still may not be sufficient enough. In *Ruth* Gaskell constructs a personal history—that is, an individualized account of experience that "insists on the power of circumstance" (Morgan 48), sort of patient's history—in order to construe her pedagogy; if Ruth as an exemplifier may be pardoned for her sins because of her personal history, inherent temperament and penance included, then perhaps it can be theorized that fallen women in reality may have their own personal histories as well, and be given sympathy. After all, "the whole notion of fallen women assumes that one's status is fixed, that there is no personal history" (Morgan 47).

Gaskell herself, within the opening sections of *Ruth*, seems to confirm that this is her task, to "enable one to understand more clearly the circumstances which contributed to the formation of character" (Gaskell 6). She goes on to inform her reader that "only one in a hundred" (Gaskell 6) is strong-willed enough and has the agency to resist these circumstances.

Though Ruth is written to be one of these few and appears predisposed towards it, it still remains an underlying goal for Gaskell. However, as contemporary reviews may show, Ruth may be too much of an exception. As one review expresses doubtfully, it is unknown if any "whether any actors on this strange complicated stage of life will be stimulated to look into cases of departure from the strict path of virtue, with a view to arrest the downward course" ("The Lady Novelists of Great Britain" 24).

Gaskell was a privileged social reformist, and her contemporaries "adopted the goal of morally remaking the rest of their society", which did not mean challenging social order but instead demanding "the practice of bourgeois virtues, both by the bourgeoisie themselves and by other classes" (Fee 633). Her construction of Ruth is not of a realistic exemplifier but instead incidentally the only conception of how a woman could potentially transgress sexual expectations for women, rise above her class status, and regain virtue. Gaskell puts Ruth through excessive penance, and Ruth dies just as she is scrubbed entirely clean and declared morally sane, ending her personal history and preventing possibility of any further contamination.

Instruments and Purpose

There is a certain amount of sympathy that one can afford to Gaskell for the inescapability of contemporary beliefs of the susceptibility of women to sin and sickness alike. One of *Ruth*'s reviewers accused Gaskell of being part of trend of feminine writers to "dwell upon these wretched stories, by way of finding out what strange chain of causes there was, and what excuse there might be" ("Modern Novelists" 1131). Women writers, while not an entirely new phenomenon, were still viewed with great amounts of suspicion, in part due to the

contemporary belief that women were influenced far more easily, making novel reading, and writing, both dangerous activities. The same rhetoric about the tendencies of women and their alleged predisposition to contagion that were applied to Ruth were applied to her author. Gaskell as a woman too is pathologized and she did not write unaware of social perceptions.

Showalter, drawing from Charlotte Bronte and Florence Nightingale's accounts of female insanity, concludes that the feminine perspective on the subject suggests that "the rise of the Victorian madwoman was one of history's self-fulfilling prophecies" (Showalter 72-73). If one allows Gaskell, as another Victorian woman writing, awareness that the same discourse that viewed women as Other and lesser in every aspect would conclude that women were more vulnerable, unstable, and subjective to madness, then *Ruth* takes on new depth. As priorly discussed, Ruth experiences bouts of madness, any one of which may have been permanent if not for intervention. The most important of these incidences is her emotional anguish at the desertion of Bellingham in volume one, when she is saved from madness only by the intervention of Mr. Benson.

While Gaskell relies on men and religious institutions (and the culturally celebrated behaviors associated with them) for Ruth's deliverance, she does not fall into convention so far as to make Ruth's pitiful circumstances the result of personal moral failings. Instead, Ruth is blameless to the point of excess, entirely a victim of circumstances created by the world around her. Ruth's madness is written as per the characterizations of the Victorian madwoman, but she was made a madwoman. Ruth, unlike other literary Victorian madwomen, had little choice and

little agency to avoid her bout of insanity. Further, Gaskell saves Ruth from madness, her penance also going to extremities, by Benson's intervention. This intervention also presents a program for redemption that insists on a form of education in addition to observation of temperament and performance of gendered labor. For all of lack of radicalism that characterizes Gaskell's writing, she is clear that society, both the deceptive aristocracy, unsympathetic employers, and the lack of infrastructure to support vulnerable young orphans, play a hand in Ruth's fall. She also clearly illustrates that society is not entirely in the wrong, and the charitable petty-bourgeois Protestant attitude may provide the solution to "history's self-fulfilling prophecies".

Gaskell's pedagogy is built from that position and perspective, and she uses sickness within the narrative as both motivator for plot and signifier. Somatic metaphor provides an additional layer of "reading" for her audience and allows one to distinguish Ruth's predisposition and internal workings throughout the novel. It relies on "medical and cultural beliefs about bodily economy" (Vrettos 23), of the relationship between the internal and external, further affected by identities of class, race, and gender. It also falls in line with contemporary "moral reform movements, conducted with evangelical zeal... seeking the extirpation of vice, dirt, sin, and every form of moral decay" (Fee 633). As both the way in which Gaskell utilizes somatic metaphor and imagery, interwoven with malady, is based on conventional ideas about gender and class as well as the purpose for which she uses it places *Ruth* within only moderately progressive bounds.

Limitations and Moderation

There remains the question then of whether Gaskell was "fundamentally interested in unrevolutionary and untraumatic change" (Kucich 200). While *Ruth* fits into a more socially progressive spectrum by authorial intent alone, it, like many of Gaskell's other novels, is marked by conventionality. It engages with a subject that put Gaskell at risk of reputation, but does so in a way that does not impede on propriety as much as it is able. While reviews of Gaskell do proclaim some sympathy for Ruth, there are still some that scorn Gaskell for engaging in the topic at all. The use of illness in *Ruth* is also a product of conventionality; religious fervor remains essential for moral reform, and instances of sickness and somatic metaphor fall within the contemporary reader's expectations for characters of particular class and gender identities. However, this is partially for the purpose of allowing the reader, alongside the characters within the novel, to "read" and diagnose Ruth and internal state.

That Ruth is even able, after seeming to earn it over and over again, to come back into grace and become the image of the angel of the horse, is radical in itself. To detail a path from sin to sainthood was in no way conventional for an era in which "the whole notion of fallen women assumes that one's status is fixed" (Morgan 47). This rehabilitation relies on the contemporary medical discourse in which gendered labor and self discipline were understood as the route to curing the moral insanity of women, as "opposed to the discipline of work were the temptations of sexual indulgence" (Fee 636). Medical discourse both produced and was itself a product of notions of femininity as specifically vulnerable and infectious, and of women as particularly unstable systems of exchange and internalization.

Ruth is characterized then by a great number of markers of conventionality and offers a prescription for change that does not connect the problem within social structure itself, but instead lighter social behaviors and more significantly, in healing the body politic of the products of vice, sin, and dirt. Gaskell however goes further than what propriety allows in proposing that fallen women, even if only this specific fallen woman, can be redeemed through care and diligence. Perhaps this "prominent ideological doubleness is not surprising in a class that sought to supplant a social hierarchy of birth with its own double hierarchy of merit and morality, and in a class that sought to distinguish itself, alternately, against both the calculating selfishness and the uncalculating profligacy it claimed to see in other social classes." (Kucich 195), and Kucich makes of apparent contradictions of Gaskell's notions of gender and transgression. Or, perhaps, *Ruth* is a novel that attempts to soften a risky pedagogy through softening its judgements on base social infrastructure and by making Mr. Bradshaw, the representative of the bourgeoisie within the novel, the pronouncer of Ruth's cleanliness.

Further, it may be argued that Gaskell herself was, as Kucich claimed, uninterested in traumatic and revolutionary change. Gaskell was deeply religious and very much entrenched in middle class notions of propriety. Her encounter with a sick and dying prostitute whom she found to be deserving of much more sympathy than she was afforded inspired her (Gérin 127). *Ruth* can be seen as a response to this, a noble but very conventional attempt at elaborating that there existed at least some fallen women whom could be saved, or that at least prostitutes, adulterers, and women with sexual transgressions marking them as sinful deserved more

sympathetic consideration than they were generally given. Then, *Ruth* is a novel never interested in delivering revolutionary pedagogy and never meant to be more than conventional, satisfied enough with the risk of its subject. It would be erroneous to say that the subject of *Ruth* was not a risk; one reviewer cites "the mistake in choosing such a heroine at all" ("Modern Novelists" 1131) referring to both the undesirability of fallen women as a subject and their inability to find Ruth a believable character. They go on to describe Gaskell's pedagogy as a "strong revulsion of dismay and with which [the reader] finds themselves competed to admit, in some individual case, that their rule is not infallible" ("Modern Novelists" 1131).

Additionally, one may view Gaskell as a product of her context. It may have been impossible to conceive of writing somatic metaphor in a way that did not rely on contemporary medical discourse when that was the prevailing thought of the time. Working-class women were understood by bourgeois Victorians to behave in a certain way and to get ill in a certain way, and the same can be applied to middle class women, aristocratic men, and so on. Anything else may have been an impossibility or at least highly unlikely to be produced by Gaskell. Forgiveness for Gaskell's appearance of conventionality is further found in remembering that "*Ruth* has no obligation to be history or propaganda" (Morgan 46), to be perfect example of a liberal reformist text or exemplifier of the inability of mid-Victorians to relax their moral standards.

Whichever, *Ruth* remains as a novel in many ways a product of contemporary discourse surrounding women and their sexuality, class, and illness. It both relies upon and confirms these beliefs, and is in many ways marked as conventional. However, it attempts to redress notions that

didn't allow for sinful women to regain virtue or at least atone for sin, and because of that and its fundamental concern with sexual transgression, constituted an authorial risk for Gaskell. While many of its reviews are not available for study, accounts of its immediate reception survive, and in many zealous households and social circles *Ruth* was prohibited and reviled (Gérin 138). Its controversy was not so pervasive as to prevent serious review by contemporaries, and many found Gaskell cruel to put Ruth through so much penance as well as death, as Bronte, Eliot, and Dickens did (Gérin 139). Others still found Ruth an unbelievable character, lacking in passion or as overly sympathetic, and still others praised *Ruth* or only found issue with its alleged equation of poverty and hardship with virtue (*The Critic* 70).

Whatever Gaskell did or did not achieve with *Ruth*, she did manage to elaborate on *Mary Barton*'s themes and insert a sympathetic account of fallen women into the literary mainstream. Her later novels, particular *North & South*, were far more popular—and arguably less controversial—than *Ruth*. Though *Ruth* was meant to be an evolution of some of the same thematic issues of *Mary Barton,* it is cited far less in modern review of Gaskell's authorship. However, *Ruth* as indicative of mid-Victorian discourse surrounding fallen women, rehabilitation, and moral insanity remains a subject of interest, and warrants study even into the modern era.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis the pedagogy of *Ruth* has been questioned; whether Ruth is recognizable to Gaskell's contemporary audience is just one crux of Gaskell's success. *Ruth* ultimately relies on conventional mid-Victorian discourse of the intersections of class and the sexuality of women, and couches this in somatic metaphor and imagery. This reliance on conventionality, and Christianity as treatment, makes *Ruth* itself very conventional. While perhaps necessary in order to successfully impart pedagogy to the readers, it also constricts Gaskell and means that her lesson, so to speak, is constrained.

Existing social systems aren't truly questioned, and legal recourse is rejected, as Bradshaw and Bellingham, the only two characters involved in government, are a part of the problem rather than the solution. The only institution that Gaskell seems to have any confidence in is the church, as Mr. Benson is a minister himself, and it is his devout faith that guides him to aid Ruth and rehabilitate her. Indeed, Bible reading is a good portion of Ruth's treatment, just as it was for contemporary institutionalized madwomen. In the end, *Ruth* is a personal history, not a universalist tale, meant to make its readers question whether the fallen women they see and encounter may have their own sympathetic back stories. While there are characters representative of certain institutions which may have complicit in Ruth's fall, Gaskell does not go so far as to prescribe that these social roles change beyond gaining some form of sympathy. Gaskell's pedagogy, while recognizing the role existing social structure plays in the path to sexual

transgression, focuses on the result and detailing a way that fallen woman may be reclaimed through rehabilitation.

Somatic metaphor and imagery, usually by way of describing temperature, flushes, expression, and other characteristics with which the reader may diagnose Ruth, is vital to Gaskell's pedagogy. It not only allows her audience and the characters within the text insight into Ruth's inner workings, but generally indicates how she internalizes the world and circumstances around her, as per the beliefs of contemporary mid-Victorian discourse. As the same discourse intertwined moral transgressions with mental and physical illness, Gaskell is able to use this as a framework with which becoming sick and curing sickness (nursing) work alongside Ruth's fall and subsequent rehabilitation. Not only does Ruth herself get sick when she commits her transgression, but her inability to nurse others functions to mark her progress towards reclaiming virtue. Her susceptibility to both moral sickness and physical sickness is additionally a product of her gender and class; as a working-class girl, mid-Victorians believed her to be much more vulnerable to the "dirt" of society and additionally a source of it as well, as demonstrated by contemporary social reform treatises.

For all that Ruth is affected by her circumstances and her identity as an orphaned working girl in that how she interacts with illness and illness imagery, she is also individualized as to be distinctive from these same identifiers. Femininity in the Victorian era was not so cohesive as to be distinct from class, and Gaskell writes Ruth in such a way that she does not fit with images of working-class femininity, and is instead describes to be fundamentally different, and likely

"above", that social role. While her naïveté explains some of her difference, Ruth is distinguished as fundamentally different from the other proletarian girls. She runs hotter and is more vulnerable, less hardened, and more dreamy. Contemporary discourse denied possibilities of change to the working class as a whole; the proletariat was "interrelated not as free agents but as products of a 'genetic' or biological inheritance" (Lamb 48), which prevented them from gaining enough distinction from their circumstances so as to rise beyond the sickness and immorality discourse associated with them. Ruth then is distinguished individually to make her, from the start, fundamentally different so as to be more vulnerable to temptation or infection, as middle class women were, and to be able to navigate a fluid class status.

Ruth's naïveté also serves pedagogy; moral insanity was thought to be a consequence from a poor mental constitution, such as what would be understood to characterize women, bourgeois or proletariat, and discipline and self control were key in cure of these deficiencies. To instill this in a patient, they "had to undergo a personal re-evolution, to be re-brought up" (Fee 640). Ruth's youth not only made her more vulnerable but also allowed her opportunity to be remade. That her rehabilitation coincides with her becoming a mother is not insignificant; Ruth's molding into the image of hegemonic femininity is also her molding into the role of motherhood. Her son, Leonard, is also one of the two most important characters from which Ruth's final forgiveness for her sins is pronounced. The other is of course Mr. Bradshaw, the novel's representative figure for the conventions of the middle class.

Fundamentally, *Ruth* utilizes somatic metaphor not only for narrative purposes but to allow for Ruth as a character to be "read" as per one's understandings of contemporary notions surrounding somatic imagery and its intersections with sexuality and class identities. Knowledge of beliefs about these intersections ascribes much greater significance to moments of illness within the novel and gives *Ruth* greater literary depth. It further uses illness for pedagogical purposes; by characterizing sexual transgression as not only the product of circumstance and identity (such as ascribing greater vulnerability to bourgeois women), as Victorian understanding allowed, but as a product and producer of moral insanity. By marking sexual transgression as a form of illness, it becomes something that can be cured; Gaskell's pedagogy relies on this and uses the same ideas for treatment that could be found in asylums and early psychiatric care. Gaskell's purpose for *Ruth* is to address fallen women in these terms in a manner that affords them greater sympathy, or at least questions the idea that they are beyond redemption. This however is undermined in many ways by the individualization of Ruth beyond what readers would expect from her circumstances, and in the end, *Ruth*'s story does not appear to be an universalist one but instead a personal history of a moment of sin and a lifetime of penance.

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